

Kulaprabha - The Alchemy of Happiness

The original audio recording of this talk is available here:

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=LOC39>

I thought that writing this talk would be quite straightforward. I've talked about the brahma viharas so often, and when I was meditating one morning a title I really liked leapt into my mind: the alchemy of happiness. I thought 'Happiness - sukha - the precursor to Insight - positive emotion - brahma viharas ... that's it! And 'alchemy' conjures up a bit of mystery: change, transformation, purification, the search for truth. Great! I've got it!'

But actually writing the talk has been very different. I struggled for two months to find a structure. I could just have redone one of my old talks, but bearing in mind that on this convention we're trying to investigate the whole system of meditation and how well it may or may not work, I knew I had to put the brahma viharas into that context, and that's where it all refused to come together. Either everything seemed completely obvious - what could I possibly say to you that you wouldn't know already? - or nothing seemed at all obvious and it all floated in and out of focus, a bit like my eyesight these days.

Last weekend I was on the phone to a friend of mine and I told her that I was struggling to make this talk come together, so she gave me a bit of advice. She said: 'Well Mum, stop trying to make it into a talk. Just tell them what you've been thinking about. Maybe it will be a series of wee talks. But stop trying to do it. If you haven't done it in two months you're not going to do it now, are you?' Those sounded like words of wisdom, and I decided to do it that way and leave it to you to make sense of it. So this is not *the* talk about the alchemy of happiness, and I don't think it has any system at all. It isn't joined up; it's like bits of a jigsaw puzzle which you may or may not be able to piece together to glimpse some kind of picture.

The question is, how do the brahma vihara practices support the other three aspects of this system of meditation? In my introductory talk I mentioned that the model I like for the system of meditation pictures it as four mutually conditioning elements, each propped against the others like sheaves of corn, so that no one practice is pre-eminent and they only work if all of them are there. I want to consider positive emotion in that way too. I also like to think of the brahma vihara practices as helping us to create a mandala of happiness, for ourselves but not only for ourselves. And then, when I was thinking about what to say, the mandala of happiness changed to a crucible of happiness - which in a sense is about going beyond happiness - and that's the image that began to interest me most. Perhaps the mandala of happiness connects more with the supporting factor of mindfulness, in which case the crucible of

happiness would probably link more with the element of spiritual death and spiritual rebirth.

Last night when I was lying in bed not sleeping very well I thought that maybe the trouble I've been having with this talk is that the title is bigger than I thought. To begin with I was just thinking 'Happiness = brahma viharas' but since then I've come to think that it's more that the brahma viharas are doorways into happiness. Happiness comes from practising them, but it's much more than that; it has to do with stillness and stability and reliability, qualities that are themselves the source of the brahma viharas. So there seems to be a mutual conditioning going on here.

Let's have a look at what the Buddha had to say about the brahma viharas. This is from the end of the Kalama Sutta. 'One who is a noble disciple, devoid of greed, devoid of ill will, undeluded, alert and resolute, keeps pervading the first direction, the east, as well as the second, the third, and the fourth, with an awareness imbued with goodwill. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, and all around, everywhere and in every respect, the all-encompassing cosmos, with an awareness imbued with goodwill, abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility and free from ill will.' And then he goes on to say exactly the same about pervading all directions with an awareness imbued with compassion, with gladness, and with equanimity - all of them everywhere and in every respect, the all-encompassing cosmos, with an awareness that's abundant, expansive and immeasurable. So that is the outcome of practising the brahma viharas. It's quite something, isn't it? It tells us how the world, the cosmos, would benefit if I, if you, if we, were *really* able to embody the brahma viharas and communicate and act from them. The *whole* world would benefit, not just the part we like and the people we prefer. It's one of the basic qualities of the brahma viharas that they are inclusive, based on the wisdom of sameness, seeing the potential in every human being. Yes, you can also see differences and different courses to be taken, but it's inclusive; no-one is missed out.

Another thing that strikes me about the set of four practices is that they are complete. Whatever feeling, whatever vedana arises, however pleasant or unpleasant, if we are practising the brahma viharas, the appropriate one moves in and blocks off the potential we have for craving and aversion. So whatever vedana arises, if we practise these four meditations and put some effort into them, we're going to be able to respond positively.

So first, metta, often described as loving kindness, appreciation and open-heartedness. Secondary benefits from practising the metta bhavana include confidence, loyalty and faith. And yes, it's significant that you start the meditation with metta for yourself. It isn't a leap into the all-encompassing cosmos. But every time we do a brahma vihara practice, we make a deliberate intentional effort to go beyond personal preference, and the aim is to practise this, on and off the meditation cushion, until it becomes natural, so natural that it becomes a samskara. Samskaras are deeply ingrained habits and we all

have lots of them - some of them all right, and some definitely not. But we don't just have them, we can develop them. Like other meditation practices, the brahma viharas can be built up until they become positive samskaras, the natural response to whatever arises. Sangharakshita refers to them as the four great rational emotions, because they are the appropriate, even rational responses to whatever arises. They are developmental, 'bhavana' practices - that is, they are about *becoming* something. But although they are about changing, you can't do them without being able to be in the moment. Moment by moment you've got to be able to be with yourself, otherwise those positive mental states are just not going to become.

One of the definitions of the Pali word sukha is 'longing for happiness'. The Pali dictionary also mentions bringing happiness, giving pleasure, participating in happiness; agreeable, pleasant, successful, blessed. (I really like 'blessed'.) It also says that sukha is a sense of ease, and pleasant to associate with. And it lists a word I hadn't come across before, *sukhita*, which means happy or blessed or glad. In the *Visuddhimagga* Buddhaghosa says, 'Bliss is that which thoroughly uproots the ills of body and mind.' If rapture is like the experience of a weary traveller who sees water or a shady wood, then bliss is actually enjoying the water or entering the forest shade. So sukha has all these associations. Also, one who dwells in happiness has put away the five hindrances. A mind which lusts for many things through sense desire is not concentrated on one thing and will not be able to enter meditation. A mind harassed by ill will does not proceed at once, but hesitates and procrastinates. If it's overcome by sloth and torpor the mind is unwieldy and if it's struck by perplexity and doubt it doesn't go forward on the path. But one who has developed sukha, happiness, experiences none of those hindrances. So the four brahma viharas - loving kindness, sympathetic joy, compassion, and equanimity - are like four unobstructed doorways into a deeper level of stillness, happiness and bliss. The mind becomes a mandala with four doorways and in the middle a deeper level of happiness still. They are also described as four great catalysts of being.

There is a natural relationship between integration and positive emotion, mindfulness and metta. In her talk Viveka said she'd been thinking of them as two sides of the same coin, and I agree, and would add my image of the sheaves of corn supporting each other. When I've felt that mutual support, the experience has become the occasion for the arising of faith, especially faith in the effectiveness of what I'm doing. Of course, it doesn't last. Well, I don't know how long that kind of experience lasts for you, but it doesn't last long for me. But the fact that you've done something once, and that you know how you did it, means that you can do it again.

A word you come across in descriptions of nidana chains, especially the spiral one, is *dhammata*, which seems to be associated with the fifth niyama. There's a certain naturalness associated with it - one condition naturally gives rise to the next, which naturally gives rise to the next - and of course if you're on the spiral path that progression is cumulative and progressive. We can get a sense

of that happening between these two factors of integration and positive emotion – but it doesn't last. It's as if there can be a balance between mindfulness and positive emotion for a while but then something interferes with it. Eventually what we are aiming for is the kind of mindfulness that can just allow the seen to be the seen: 'in the seen, only the seen, in the heard, only the heard'. When we were doing those exercises the other day, when we were just listening, I was very aware of myself being the person who was listening. I had a sense that if I could just drop something – I didn't know how – I would just be hearing, but I wouldn't be the person who was listening, and that was quite an uncomfortable sort of awareness. So we can think about mindfulness in those terms. There are lots of psychological obstacles to mindfulness, but I'm more interested in talking about the edge where an obstacle arises, that edge where you're just trying to hear and not do anything else, not be the person who is hearing. That's the edge where mindfulness supports spiritual death, the edge where that self who is self-consciously doing the listening is just being dropped away from.

So how can positive emotion help that kind of obstacle, not just some humdrum normal psychological obstacle, but something with a bit more of an edge? When we drop down into just being the hearer as opposed to the person who's listening, that leads to going beyond our usual experience of things. I certainly felt that if I could do it, which I couldn't, I'd be in a completely different space in my mind. It's not natural to step into the unknown, into that arena in which you can feel the possibility of death. In fact, it's natural to throw up obstacles to it, to try and stop it happening. Fear comes up, and insecurity, and then doubt. It can be doubt about oneself or just doubt about the practice. Well, I'm saying 'just', but actually those two fears are equally powerful.

When obstacles of this sort appear, what is the function of positive emotion? I have been saying that there's a natural augmenting relationship between mindfulness and positive emotion, but when there's fear or insecurity or some other obstacle, maybe it's not so much a natural augmenting process as that the brahma viharas provide the counterweight to fear, or the counterbalance, even the antidote. Positive emotion and the brahma viharas in particular act against some very ingrained tendencies in us. Fear of pain. Fear of suffering, which makes us want to pull back from it, to deflect pain, to avoid any occasion that might be painful. Another ingrained tendency is dependence on pleasure. The brahma viharas provide a strong antidote to both of those. Another ingrained tendency we have is seeking security in the 'permanent' - which of course involves hiding from the fact of impermanence. Thinking about the relationship between the brahma viharas and mindfulness I ended up feeling that there was a two-fold relationship, each aspect of which supports the other. One is enhancing and strengthening, the one flowing into the other, with happiness naturally arising out of that, and the other is a counterbalancing connection between the mental obstacles to integration, especially fear, and the countering qualities of the four brahma viharas, resulting in freedom from fear.

But I think it isn't quite accurate to say that the brahma viharas are the *opposite* of fear. It's more that if fear has arisen, if we can introduce one or other of the brahma viharas into the moment, the brahma viharas come in *alongside* fear, and that changes the whole situation. It isn't an easy thing to do, because fear has its own gut-punching effect. But if we can bring in metta or compassion (equanimity might be a bit difficult) and imagine them just walking alongside fear, something like that, that gives a bit of space and time to allow the fear to disperse, because there are positive supports in our mind at the same time. So in suggesting that metta, for example, is a counterbalance to fear, I'm not suggesting that it's the opposite. It's more that it's something you bring in that helps dispel fear. The fear doesn't magically disappear. If it's there it's just something we have to walk beside until it does disperse. But at least we don't have to walk only with that – we can bring in a few supports.

So if there are these interactions and relationships between integration and positive emotion, where's the fulcrum, where's the leverage point? Is there one? My intuition is that there is. A fulcrum is an interesting image here because it's a balancing point but it's also where a small amount of effort can produce a big effect because you've got leverage. It seems obvious that feeling, vedana, is the fulcrum for the interaction between mindfulness and positive emotion, because feeling is where positive emotion can act most effectively. And of course it's one of the four foundations of mindfulness. So it's a particular facet of mindfulness where positive emotion can help produce the creative response that we need if we're going to extract ourselves from the vortex, the quicksand, the mire of samsara.

So that's how I've been thinking about it: that feeling, vedana, is the fulcrum that allows the brahma viharas really to engage, to interact, with mindfulness. Feeling manifests over a wide spectrum from extremely unpleasant to extremely pleasant. So we could ask ourselves over what kind of band-width of feeling we are able to respond creatively – not just on the odd occasion, not just on a good day, but consistently. How wide is the spectrum of feeling across which we can consistently respond creatively with one or other of the brahma viharas? However far along the feeling spectrum contact occurs, whatever is going on in and around us, how consistently positive can we be? Whatever our own answer to that is, it's obvious enough that what we need to try to do is to expand that range, so that we can cover more and more of that feeling spectrum.

Our natural response to feeling is not to respond with metta, compassion, gladness or equanimity. Normally, if we feel a pleasant feeling we respond with craving – usually so fast that we don't even notice – and we tend to respond to unpleasant feeling with aversion. Feeling itself is karmically neutral, so if there's a pleasant or unpleasant feeling there, it's not in itself unskillful, but we bring along with that our tendencies to aversion or craving, our own collection of samskaras. They are knitted together, strongly bound – it's another mandala, our mandala of samskaras, at the centre of which is the

self. So when pleasant or unpleasant feeling arises, we do not normally respond with one or another of the brahma viharas.

But the mandala of the brahma viharas counters that self-made mandala of old samskaras with the possibility of creating a new natural response, new samskaras. That's where transformation, alchemy, comes in. We start off with our old mandala of self, plus craving, aversion, delusion, the five skandhas associated with clinging. These underlying tendencies slipstream in beneath feeling, and we've got all the apparatus there ready to grasp onto it. That's the old mandala of self. But that doesn't have to carry on happening. We can create a new mandala with new samskaras, progressively less self-centred, less susceptible to those underlying tendencies - still five skandhas but eventually not associated with clinging.

So the way to create the mandala of happiness, and the four doorways that can allow a deeper happiness to arise, is to develop mindfulness of feeling, and to be as aware as we can of our underlying tendencies to craving, ill will and delusion. Once we are aware that we have a choice, we can choose. And then, what arises? Contentment, satisfaction and pleasure. Satisfaction can arise even from an unpleasant feeling if you deal with it creatively - you get the satisfaction of that creative response. We become beings who are more capable of dwelling in these lovely abodes, the brahma viharas. The potential in us for all of the four brahma viharas to manifest is increased every time we make an effort and manage to respond to pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feeling with loving kindness rather than craving or aversion. It's such a little thing just to catch the feeling and then have the presence of mind and the effort and the practice and the momentum to bring in loving kindness. Well, it's easy to say but difficult to do. But when we can do it, we just can't lose, because even an unpleasant feeling becomes an occasion for satisfaction. We can't lose, and neither can anyone else that we interact with.

The brahma viharas may be doorways in this mandala, leading into a deeper sense of happiness. But sometimes doorways close. When they close, they close against craving and aversion. When you do the four brahma vihara meditations a lot, you start to notice how they interact with one another and mutually augment one another. If you open the doorway to metta, say, what happens is that an enemy tries to slip through that door. The near enemy of metta is sentimental attachment. So how do you counter that? - with compassion. On the other hand, if there's an unpleasant feeling and you're feeling compassion, the tendency to aversion to an unpleasant feeling is likely to come in, and there the enemy is horrified anxiety. But then you counter that with gladness. You remind yourself that it's unpleasant at the moment but it's not going to last. But gladness itself, in response to a pleasant feeling, slips into another kind of craving - vicarious satisfaction - and again you slip off into craving in response to the feeling of someone else's joy, a horrible limpet-like living through the joy of another person. That too can be countered - with equanimity. You remind yourself that things come and go, pleasant and unpleasant feelings come and go. But equanimity itself has a

near enemy. If you don't manage to hold the pleasant and unpleasant feeling, or compassion and gladness, together in your mind, you can slip off into a turbulent emotion, although equanimity should be quite calm. And you counter that with metta. You end up with a swirl of brahma viharas, each able to counteract the near enemy of the previous one – or four doorways opening and closing. They open when we have the response of loving kindness or compassion and close to keep away these near enemies - and when they close some of these other brahma viharas come in behind them and help shut the door.

Your User Name 9/5/05 21:59

Comment:

So sooner or later, you've got this mandala of happiness. But what are you going to do with it? Having acquired the talent for responding with the four brahma viharas, having put in some effort and acquired a measure of the deeper happiness that comes from it, what are you going to do with them? What are you going to do especially with the upekkha bhavana, which is in some ways the fruit of the other three? What comes to mind here is a story in a sutta of the Digha Nikaya called the Maha Govinda Sutta in which we find the Buddha talking to a deva in the middle of the night. The deva says 'Do you remember when you were the great steward Maha Govinda?' The Buddha says 'Yes, I remember.' The deva says, 'It was really great! You got so many people to be reborn into god realms, it was wonderful! There were hardly any people being reborn into the realms of the asuras, everyone was getting reborn into the god realms.' And the deva went on to tell the whole story, the crux of which was that the Great Steward was really good at everything he turned his hand to. Rumours went round that he could even talk to Brahma. He couldn't, but he thought that maybe if he meditated, he would be able to. So he meditated and he still couldn't. But Brahma took pity on him and appeared anyway and said, 'Is there anything that you'd like? Is there anything I can help you with?' And the Buddha, the Great Steward as he was then, said, 'That's quite an opportunity, isn't it? Yes, I would like you to teach me how to gain immortal life.' So then Brahma gives him a teaching all about how to practise ethics. He goes off and he practises it, and because he's such an exemplar everybody else in all the kingdoms does the same, with the result that they are all reborn in the god realms. So the deva says, 'That was really good wasn't it? The asuras didn't like it, but we thought it was fantastic.' But the Buddha says, 'No, it wasn't good at all. All that happened was that I and thousands and thousands of my followers were reborn in god realms and stuck there for aeons. We couldn't get out. No insight arose.' At that the deva looked a bit forlorn. And the Buddha said, 'Look, when I was that Great Steward, of course it didn't do harm, it did a lot of good, but all that happened was that we were born in a god realm, whereas what I teach now leads inevitably to the arising of insight in my followers and that's what is important.'

This story, which I like very much, was what came to mind when I was considering this question: What am I going to do with this talent for happiness? I can make my life much happier because I can learn to avoid the grosser aspects of craving and aversion. I'm happier as a result, and maybe

some of the people I'm in contact with will also benefit. But is that all I'm going to do with it? What would happen then? Well, what would happen is that I'd get reborn in a god realm – or some equivalent. Is that what our system of meditation is really about? Is that what the Dharma is really about? No, it isn't. At this point I started thinking that it isn't just a mandala of happiness that we need to be aware of; it's also happiness as a crucible. So that's the link with alchemy. Alchemy was a precursor to chemistry but more complex. It's about creating something new using heat. It's about transformation and purification, and the alchemist has to be purified as well, otherwise the experiment won't work. You put certain things together, you get rid of certain impurities, you purify yourself, and you bring something new into being. But the concern of the alchemist isn't just to create a new material; it's easy enough to do that. It's newness of a completely different order. The alchemist is concerned with a search for truth, eternal truth or eternal life, and when the newness happens, when something new is created in the alchemist's crucible, it's of a new order, not more of the same, but something completely different.

And that led my thinking onto something different. What came to mind was Mahaprajapati's question to the Buddha. She asked him how to recognise his teaching and got the answer that the Buddha's teaching is whatever conduces to simplicity, wanting little, stillness, solitude, contentment, energy not sluggishness, delight in the good and nonattachment. So once we've got some facility with positive emotion and the brahma viharas, maybe we should be asking ourselves whether our practice of the brahma viharas is leading us into that kind of space, the kind of space that the Buddha was indicating to Mahaprajapati. If we create a talent for happiness, what are we going to do with that happiness? Have a happy life? Why not? But just me? Just mine? Just my immediate concerns? Do I use that talent to stay on familiar ground or to step into the unknown?

This whole idea of the crucible of happiness moved the way I was thinking towards the connection between positive emotion and spiritual death, and I came to think that this idea of mindfulness and metta being two sides of the one coin can be a trap. A lot can blossom out of it, but if you set yourself up to be so much happier and more focussed than you were before, it's tempting just to settle into that. There's nothing wrong with that. It's a happy human life. But it isn't all there is. That's why there are four aspects to our system of meditation, not just two – because we need to bring in the aspects of spiritual death and spiritual rebirth.

This is what it boils down to – do we try to keep happiness for ourselves? I don't think so, and Bhante doesn't think so either. This poem of his seems to show the uselessness of trying to keep happiness for ourselves:

Hour after hour, day
After day we try
To grasp the Ungraspable, pinpoint

The Unpredictable. Flowers
Wither when touched, ice
Suddenly cracks beneath our feet. Vainly
We try to track birdflight through the sky trace
Dumb fish through deep water, try
To anticipate the earned smile the soft
Reward, even
Try to grasp our own lives. But Life
Slips through our fingers
Like snow. Life
Cannot belong to us. We
Belong to Life. Life
Is King.

So keeping happiness to ourselves isn't going to work even if we try it. Could we think in terms of a responsibility of happiness, then? One of the thoughts I've had, partly out of meditating, partly out of reflecting, and partly as a result of travelling - I think I got this idea in Fiji - is that happiness does bring responsibility. If you practise the brahma viharas you gain a stiller centre, something that's more reliable than what you've had in your life until then, and you gain immensely from that. But it brings the responsibility to act from the highest level of awareness you are capable of. That's what came into my mind from a particular experience in Fiji. At the time I was getting the rewards of meditating and feeling very much connected with the life all about me. It was effusive and effulgent there. In every space something grows - it's green and beautiful, and there are flowers everywhere. I had a very strong sense of connection. I was me but I was just as much what I was looking at out of the window of the bus. The feeling of connectedness was so strong that I had tears streaming down my face. It was like a gift from the universe, incredibly beautiful. What came into my mind, not immediately but later, was the responsibility that comes with that. My side of the bargain, having felt that sense of connectedness, was to try to act from the highest level of awareness I was capable of. You could say that everything I was looking at - trees, flowers - also had that responsibility, but they were not capable of such a high level of awareness as I am. It's my responsibility to find that within myself and act from it. The universe's side of the bargain is that it gives me beauty and connectedness. So there are these responsibilities of happiness and that's where things can start to be transformed, where the crucible of happiness can come into its own and do what it really can do, what it's meant to do.

The image of a crucible of happiness has a kind of poignancy. I'm happy; others are not. Every time I'm happy, somebody else isn't. When Padmavati and I were travelling, and I was thinking these thoughts, I wrote a postcard to Bhante about his poem 'The Bodhisattva's Reply'. I'm not going to read all of it.

What will you say to those

Whose lives spring up between
Custom and circumstance
As weeds between wet stones,
Whose lives corruptly flower
Warped from the beautiful,
Refuse and sediment
Their means of sustenance -
What will you say to them?

... Or those dim shadows which
Through the pale gold tropic dawn
From the outcaste village flit
Balancing on their heads
Baskets to bear away
Garbage and excrement,
Hugging the wall for fear
Of the scorn of their fellow men -
What will you say to them?

And wasted lives that litter
The streets of modern cities,
Souls like butt-ends tossed
In the gutter and trampled on,
Human refuse dumped
At the crossroads where civilisation
And civilization meet
To breed the unbeautiful -
What will you say to them?

'I shall say nothing, but only
Fold in Compassion's arms
Their frailty till it becomes
Strong with my strength, their limbs
Bright with my beauty, their souls
With my wisdom luminous, or
Till I have become like them
A seed between wet stones
Of custom and circumstance.'

In the postcard I wrote to Bhante I said that I could imagine myself writing equivalent verses to some of his, trying to express that kind of emotion. But I can't imagine having written that last verse, because that's where one's own personal happiness, all the strength that comes from that, all the talent one might have, is given to the service of other people, not oneself.

So maybe what we need to think about with respect to the brahma viharas is that we need to put them in the service of spiritual death. We put in such a lot of effort into evoking them, developing them, but then we need to be

prepared to die to them, let them go. The upekkha bhavana in particular comes to mind because in that meditation you're trying to hold together in your mind awareness of suffering and awareness of joy, not one and then the other, and then back, but together. It's from that that upekkha arises, and in doing it you become aware of the rise and fall of pain and pleasure, joy and compassion, you become aware of conditionality. You also become very alone; it's a very striking experience of aloneness when you really enter that space through the doorway of upekkha, though at the same time very connected. What happens with me is that I reach that stage of aloneness but then I waver and go into feeling lonely. The 'me' bit of me gets a bit scared.

The upekkha bhavana calls up qualities like steadiness and loyalty and perseverance. But also, because it's about looking at the rise and fall of vedanas, it helps us see things more clearly. You can do that with the mindfulness of vedana practice and you can also do it with the upekkha bhavana. You're doing it on the basis of love the whole time; it's all on a basis of metta. You see things more as they are but on a basis of love and regard for yourself and others.

And the more you see, the less you keep, because the more you see, the more you realise that you have to loosen the sense of self, that it's the sense of the old self with all the samskaras that creates the bother. One outcome of practising the brahma viharas is to loosen that sense of self, and seeing that will lead us to do it more and more. I was on retreat with Dhammadassin recently and she's a great one for quoting Rilke. We were talking about loosening self and how the brahma viharas are so good at doing that, and she quoted what Rilke said about 'the price of seeing'. When you really see things as they are, it's a wonderful experience, it has beauty, but there's a price. Rilke says that renunciation is the price of seeing. I think there's a connection there with what I felt in Fiji. Yes, I could be given that experience of beauty and connectedness but with it came a responsibility on my side - the responsibility to live from the highest level of awareness that I can, which involves loosening the sense of self that I have. Rilke is perhaps saying that in a different way, in saying that renunciation is the price of seeing.

The more we see through doing these practices, the less we want to keep, the less we identify with, the less hold this central 'me' has. To go back to that verse of Kenneth White's about the centre and the circumference that I read in my introduction, he said you get to the point where the struggle at the centre lessens. I think that the real way to use the brahma viharas is to use them to lessen the struggle at the centre. Have a happy life, sure, and help other people in ordinary ways, but the crucial thing to do is to lessen the struggle at the centre of ourselves. So, to conclude, I'm suggesting that the happiness created in the crucible of the brahma viharas needs to be put into the service of spiritual death and thus be part of the rebirth that happens as a consequence. Probably what we fear is that we're going to lose everything if we do that. And we do lose something; we lose happiness that's based on self. Happiness based on self will cease. Happiness based on no-self will arise.